



# Department of Planning and Zoning



## The Comprehensive Zoning Plan

### What is the Comprehensive Zoning Plan?

The Howard County Council is empowered by the County Charter and Code to divide the County into zoning districts and adopt regulations governing the use of land within these districts. Together, the zoning maps and regulations are known as the County's Comprehensive Zoning Plan.

Zoning affects issues such as the supply of land available for various types of development, the range of land uses allowed within a given area and the buffers provided between different land uses. The Comprehensive Zoning Plan works in conjunction with other local laws governing development, such as the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations, the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance and the Forest Conservation Ordinance.

Zoning is one of the tools used to implement the County's General Plan. The General Plan, also adopted by the County Council, is a policy guide for the County's future. It addresses land use, transportation, public facilities, water and sewerage, parkland, housing, human services and environmental protection. A new General Plan is generally adopted every eight to ten years with a new Comprehensive Zoning Plan process following closely.

Zoning was first enacted in Howard County in 1948. The current Comprehensive Zoning Plan was adopted in 2004, with continued items becoming effective in 2006 following adoption of the 2000 General Plan.

### How is a new Comprehensive Zoning Plan adopted?

A new Comprehensive Zoning Plan typically revises, rather than completely altering, the previous Plan. A proposed Comprehensive Zoning Plan generally includes amendments to the zoning maps for all or a substantial portion of the County, as well as new or revised Zoning Regulations. The following steps must be followed for the Council to adopt a Comprehensive Zoning Plan:

- The County Council or, more typically, the Department of Planning and Zoning prepares a proposed Comprehensive Zoning Plan. When preparing the Plan, the Council or Department may consider map amendment proposals from property owners. The proposed Plan may incorporate some of these proposals, but must also include a list of the map

proposals requested by individual property owners that were not incorporated as part of the Plan.

- The Howard County Planning Board holds public hearings on the Comprehensive Zoning Plan. Anyone interested may attend the hearing and comment on the proposed maps and regulations. Comments may also be made on the list of map proposals that were not included in the Plan.
- For up to 60 days following the completion of the Planning Board's hearings, property owners may submit new proposals for zoning map amendments to the Planning Board.
- The Planning Board holds public hearings on the newly submitted map proposals. The Planning Board submits its recommendations to the County Council.
- The County Council holds public hearings on the Comprehensive Zoning Plan. Again, anyone interested may attend and make comments.
- After the public hearings are concluded, the County Council holds work sessions to discuss the proposed Plan and the input received from the Planning Board and the public. These sessions are open to the public, but no more public comments can be received.
- Based on the discussion at its work sessions, the Council introduces a County Council Bill proposing the adoption of a Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. The Bill is heard and voted on according to standard County Council Bill procedures. It cannot include any zoning map amendment or substantive amendment to the regulations which was not the subject of the prior public hearings before the Planning Board and County Council. If such amendments are proposed, steps 4 through 6 must be repeated.

### **How is the public notified?**

Citizens often become aware of these public hearings through newspaper articles and other media coverage. In addition, there are legal requirements for notifying the public of a proposed Comprehensive Zoning Plan:

- The time and place of the initial Planning Board and County Council public hearings be published twice at least 30 days before the hearings in newspapers of general circulation in the County. These legal advertisements must let the public know how to obtain information on the Comprehensive Zoning Plan.
- Property owners who submit new map proposals during the 60 day period after the initial Planning Board hearings must notify adjoining property owners of their proposal by certified mail.

### **Can the Comprehensive Zoning Plan be amended?**

A proposal to the County Council to amend the Zoning Regulations can be submitted at any time by an individual, the Department of Planning and Zoning or a County Council member. A proposal to the Zoning Board to rezone particular parcels of land can be submitted by the

property owner, the Department of Planning and Zoning or a County Council member. The County Council and the Zoning Board typically hear several of these proposals each year.

These amendments are much more limited in scope than a proposal for a new Comprehensive Zoning Plan. They are usually limited to a single property or a few provisions of the Zoning Regulations.

**An important note...**

This information provides a general overview of the Comprehensive Zoning process. More detailed information is found in other documents including the Howard County Charter and County Code.

For more information contact:

The Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning  
(410) 313-2350, TTY 410-313-2323 or [www.howardcountymd.gov](http://www.howardcountymd.gov) or visit Planning & Zoning's Customer Service Center on the first floor of the George Howard Building, 3430 Courthouse Drive, Ellicott City, Maryland, 212043.

Office Hours are:

Monday through Friday

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Written inquiries may also be sent to our office at the above address.

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